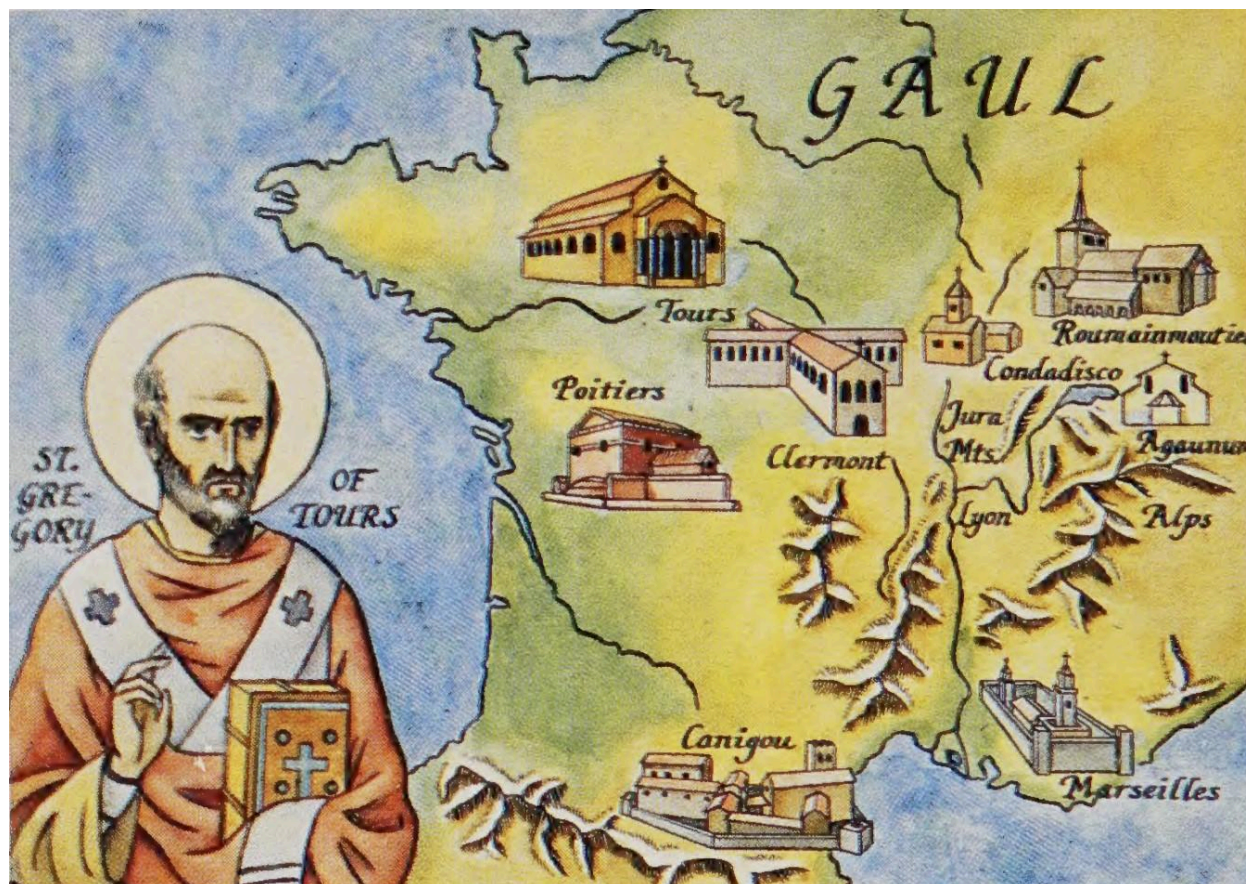


Orthodox Monasticism in 5th and 6th-Century Gaul

Fr. Seraphim Rose



A map of ancient Gaul depicting major centers of Western Orthodox monasticism.

The heart of the Christian life of early Orthodox Gaul was monasticism. Orthodox monasticism sprang up on the soil of Gaul almost as soon as news of the great Egyptian Fathers reached the West. Once Christian Gaul had been given the example of its first great native monastic saint, St. Martin of Tours, its monastics already numbered in the thousands, some 2,000 of whom attended the funeral of St. Martin in 397. With the founding of the monastery of Lerins in the Egyptian tradition at the dawn of the new century and the writings of St. John Cassian on the spiritual teaching of the Egyptian Fathers early in the 5th century, the golden age of monasticism in Gaul may be said to have begun. We know of the founding of some 200 monasteries in Gaul in the next two centuries, and probably there were many more, and the wonderworking saints from among these communities were already past counting.

However, the history of Orthodox monasticism in Gaul in this period is not at all one of institutions. The monastic “orders” of the medieval West, with their centralized government and uniform rule, were, of course, unheard of in this early period of fresh monastic fervour. Even the dominance of the Rule of St. Benedict (+529) over the monastic institutions of the West (a dominance which, for all its good points, also indicated a waning of the early monastic fervour of the West) was still several centuries away. The Orthodox East set the spiritual tone of monastic Gaul in these centuries.

The most general picture of the monasticism of these centuries in the West is to be found in the writings of St. Gregory of Tours, particularly in the [*Life of the Fathers*](#), but also scattered throughout the pages of the [*History of the Franks*](#) and his other works. But we will look at his writings in vain for an account of monastic institutions; we will find the names of a few monasteries, and there is almost nothing on monastic rules or government. He is interested, first of all, not even in monks or nuns (i.e., formally tonsured monastics) but in *ascetic strugglers and their spiritual deeds*. For the most part, he recounts the exploits of ascetics renowned for their sanctity and miracles, but he also recounts tales of those who went astray, holding these up as a warning to those who would undertake the path of spiritual struggle. The center of his attention, and that of monastic Gaul, is *spiritual struggle* itself. At this time, the forested “desert” of Orthodox Gaul breathes the same freshness, fervour and freedom as the Egyptian and Palestinian deserts, as chronicled in the [*Lausiac History*](#) and other such classic accounts of early Eastern monasticism. Let us see if we can recapture something of the spirit of the “flight to the desert” in 5th and 6th century Gaul by examining some of the texts of this time period's great Western monastic Fathers.

THE TEACHING OF ST. JOHN CASSIAN

We know little of the written sources by which the Orthodox monastic teaching was given to St. Martin's disciples and other early monastic strugglers in Gaul; probably, there was not much more than St. Athanasius' [*Life of St. Anthony*](#) and one other of the early Latin versions of the [*Lives*](#) and [*Sayings*](#) of the Egyptian Fathers. These sources were sufficient in the presence of a living model of the monastic ideal such as St. Martin. Still, when the monks of Gaul became numbered in the thousands and numerous new monasteries were being opened, the need for a rather “systematic” written account of the monastic teaching became acutely felt. As with one voice, the monastic fathers of Gaul turned for this account to St. John Cassian, abbot of a newly-founded monastery in Marseilles, who had just returned from a long sojourn in the monastic deserts of Egypt and Palestine. Having thoroughly absorbed the teaching of the Eastern Fathers and being a man of spiritual discernment himself, he answered

their plea with two books: the *Institutes*, setting forth the outward order of monasticism (dress, services, discipline, etc.) and the spiritual teaching on an elementary level, and the *Conferences*, giving the more profound monastic teaching of the great Egyptian Fathers. These works, addressed and dedicated to various abbots and monastic founders in Gaul, were by far the most influential monastic source books in 5th and 6th century Gaul and (albeit, to a lesser extent) in other Western countries as well. To understand the monastic movement which St. Gregory describes, we can begin in no better way than by a brief account of the teaching of St. Cassian, and in particular of the “ABCs” of monasticism contained in the *Institutes*, the single book that is most often mentioned in the monastic accounts of this period. (All citations translated here, with book and chapter number, are from the Russian translation of Bishop Peter of Ufa, Moscow, 1892.)



The book is dedicated to Castor, Bishop of Apt (a short distance north of Marseilles), who had just established a coenobitic monastery in his diocese. In his Introduction, St. Cassian explains what is demanded of him and what he intends to give: “Desiring that the coenobitic monasteries in your region should be ordered according to the rules of the Eastern, and in particular the Egyptian monasteries . . . you demand of me, poor in word and knowledge, that I set forth those monastic rules which I saw in Egypt and Palestine, and of which I heard from the Fathers so that the brethren of your monastery might know the way of life which the saints lead there.’ Following in the footsteps of monastic teachers “‘outstanding in life, understanding, and eloquence, such as Basil the Great, Jerome, and others,’ he promises to speak of

the monastic rules, the origin of the eight chief vices, and how they may be uprooted, on the basis of what he learned in the East, for “there can be no new brotherhood in the West, in the land of Gaul, better than those monasteries.”

Although St. Cassian notes, in this same Introduction, that not all the monastic rules of the Egyptian desert may be applicable in Gaul, “owing to the severity of the climate and the difficulty and difference of manners,” and in general he is condescending to “Western” weakness — still, he is rather merciless in castigating any aspect of Gallic monasticism in

practice that smacks of self-pampering or idleness. Then, even as today, a large part of the interest in monasticism was a product of idle dreaming, which would rather not face the daily struggles and humiliations necessary for the forging of true spiritual life according to the Gospel. Thus, St. Cassian places much emphasis on the necessity of just plain *work*. ‘The cause of the fact that in these (Western) regions we do not see monasteries with such a multitude of brethren (i.e., thousands and tens of thousands) is that they are not supported by what their own labours can acquire; but if the generosity of another might furnish them sufficient food, then a love of idleness and distraction of heart do not allow them any longer to remain in that place. Therefore, there is a saying among the ancient Fathers of Egypt: a labouring monk is tempted by one demon, while a lazy one is attacked by a numberless multitude of demons’ (*Institutes* X, 23). The Eastern Fathers “think that the more fervent they will be in handiwork and labours, the more will be born in them the desire for the higher purity of spiritual contemplation” (II, 12). There is a definite correlation between willingness to work and a genuine striving for spiritual attainments: “Equally exercising the powers of body and soul, they equalize the gain of the outward man and profit to the inward man, opposing to the passionate movements of the heart and the inconstant wave of thoughts the heaviness of handiwork, as some kind of firm, unwavering anchor, by which one can restrain the distraction and wandering of the heart within the cell as in a safe harbour” (II, 14). Zeal for work, in fact, is a measuring stick of spiritual advancement: “The Egyptian Fathers in no way allow monks to be idle, especially the young, measuring the condition of their heart and their advancement in patience and humility by their zeal for work” (IX, 22). Awareness of this basic principle of spiritual life is what produces the “down-to-earth,” even “rough” quality of a genuine Orthodox monastery even today. A novice being formed in such a spiritual atmosphere often finds himself in hectic circumstances that test his natural love of idleness and repose. Thus, Abba Dorotheus, author of a 6th-century “ABCs” of monasticism, describes ‘his own monastic training: “When I was living in coenobitism, the Abbot, at the advice of the Elders, made me the receiver of visitors, while not long before this I had had a severe illness. And thus it happened that visitors would come in the evening, and I would spend the evening with them; then camel drivers would come, and I would serve them; and often after I had gone to sleep, another need would arise, and they would wake me up, and meanwhile the hour of the Vigil would also be approaching. Hardly would I have fallen asleep when the canonarch would wake me up, but from labour or from illness, I would be exhausted. Sleep would again take such possession of me that, weakened by fever, I would not remember myself and would answer through sleep: ‘Very well, my Lord, may God remember your love and reward you; you have commanded, I will come, O Lord.’ Then, when he went out, I would again fall asleep and be very sad that I was late to church. And since the canonarch could not wait for me, I begged two brethren, one to wake me up, and the

other not to let me doze at the Vigil; and believe me, brethren, I revered them as if through them my salvation was accomplished, and maintained toward them great piety” (Abba Dorotheus, *Spiritual Instructions*). A similar hectic novitiate, in modern times, was spent by the Optina elder Joseph, who, for a private cell, was given the busy waiting room of Elder Ambrose! The idle dreamers among monastic aspirants do not survive under such conditions; they often leave because the monastery is “not spiritual enough” — not realizing that thus they are depriving themselves of the spiritual “anchor” without which they will wander in vain dissatisfaction at not finding their ‘ideal monastery.’

Laziness is not the worst sin of monastic aspirants. Still, without the love of labour, they will never even enter into the struggle of monastic life or understand the most elementary principles of spiritual combat.

If the novice has a zeal for work, there is hope that he can acquire an understanding of the other ABCs of monastic life. The first of these is *cutting off the will*. “The elder strives first of all to instruct the novice to conquer his will, desiring that through this he might gradually ascend to the highest perfection; and for this, he deliberately orders him to do what he does not like. By much experience, it has been shown that a monk (especially a young one) cannot bridle his desires if he has not learned through obedience to mortify his will. Therefore, they say that he who has not first learned to conquer his will can in no way suppress anger, despondency, fleshly lust; he cannot have true humility, constant unity and harmony with the brethren, and long remain in the community” (IV, 8). The novice who is unwilling to cut off his will by monastic obedience often finds that he is “not understood” by the monastic authorities, or that he is forced to do things “unsuited” to him, or that his “zeal” in performing ascetic labours (according to his own understanding, of course) is not appreciated. Still, the true lover of obedience, like the lover of labour, rejoices in the midst of the hard work of going against his own will, even when it may seem to his earthly logic that he is “right” and his spiritual father is “wrong.”

Another important part of the monastic basic training is learning *not to trust one’s own judgment*, which is closely bound up with *the revelation of thoughts*. “If we wish to follow the commandments of the Gospel and be imitators of the Apostles and the whole of the early Church, or of the Fathers who in our times have followed their virtues and perfection, we should not trust our own opinions, promising ourselves evangelical perfection from this cold and pitiful condition; but following their steps, we should strive not to deceive ourselves, and thus we shall fulfill the good order and the commands of the monastery so that we might renounce this world in truth” (VII, 18).

“Giving novices the beginning instruction, they strive to raise them to greater perfection, at the same time finding out whether their humility is true or pretended. And the more easily to attain this, they teach them not to hide any of the thoughts of their hearts out of false shame, but to reveal them to their elder immediately after they arise, and in the judging of them not to trust their own opinion, but to consider bad or good only what the elder shall recognize as such. Because of this, the cunning enemy cannot catch the inexperienced young monk in anything; he can in no way deceive one who trusts not his own but his elder’s judgment’ (IV, 9).

Despite the ascetic prodigies for which the Eastern Fathers are noted, the emphasis of their spiritual teaching is not at all on outward asceticism. ‘The infirmity of the flesh does not hinder purity of heart, if we use only the food that is needful for strengthening our infirmity, and not that which desire demands . . . Fasting and continence consist in moderation . . . Each must fast as much as necessary for the taming of fleshly warfare” (V, 7, 8, 9).

The purpose of the monastic discipline is to *uproot the passions and acquire the virtues*. In Egypt, the elders see that novices “discover both the causes of the passions by which they are tempted and the means against them. . . These true physicians of souls, averting by spiritual instruction as by some heavenly medicine the afflictions of heart that might arise in the future, do not allow the passions to grow in the souls of youths, revealing to them both the cause of the passion that threatens and the means for healing’ (XI, 16). It may well be imagined what pain this self-knowledge process causes in the novice's soul, who usually comes to a monastery full of illusions about himself.

All of the virtues must be sought together, and all of the passions fought at the same time, for “he who does not possess several of the virtues has not mastered any of them to perfection. For how can one quench the blazing heat of lust, which is kindled not merely from the desire of the body but also from the fault of the soul, if he cannot tame the anger which bursts forth from the incontinence of the heart alone? Or how can he handle the sensuous arousal of the flesh and soul if he cannot conquer the simple vice of pride?” (V. 11).

The spiritual battle to acquire virtues and uproot passions is, above all, an *inward* battle: the chief enemy is not outside of us but in our own passionate nature; our advancement in virtue is judged not chiefly by our outward actions but by our inward state; the means of battle is not primarily outward acts (such as avoiding people, in order to avoid occasions of temptation), but working on one’s inner man. “It is clear that disturbance occurs in us not always because of others, but more often from our own faults, because we have in us the hidden causes of offence and the seeds of vices, which, as soon as the rain of temptation pours

on our soul, immediately produce sprouts and fruits” (IX, 5). “Perfection of heart is acquired not so much by going away from people as by the virtue of patience. If patience will be made strong and sure, it can keep us peaceful even with those who hate peace; but if it will not be acquired, we shall constantly be in discord even with those who are more perfect and better than we” (IX, 7). “If we wish to receive that higher divine reward of which it is said: Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God (Matt. 5:8), then it is not only in our actions that we must suppress anger but it must be torn up by the roots from the hidden part of the soul as well” (VII, 19). “For those who seek perfection, it is insufficient merely not to become angry at another, for we remember that when we were in the desert, we became angry at a writing reed when its thickness or thinness did not please us, as also at a knife when it did not cut quickly with a dull blade, and at a flint if a spark did not quickly fly from it when we were hastening to the reading; the flash of dissatisfaction went so far that we could put down and pacify the disturbance of soul in no other way than by pronouncing a curse on the unfeeling objects, or at least on the devil” (VIII, 18). “We have nothing to fear from the foe without; the enemy is concealed within ourselves. In us, there proceeds a daily inward warfare; after gaining a victory in it, everything is reconciled to the warrior of Christ and submits to him. We shall not have a foe whom we have to fear outside of us if what is within us will be conquered and subjugated to the spirit . . . The forcing of the flesh joined with contrition of spirit, comprises a sacrifice most pleasing to God and a worthy dwelling of sanctity in the hidden parts of a pure, well-adorned spirit” (V, 21).

Most importantly, the monastic struggler in this inner warfare must *judge himself and not others*. “A monk is subjected to the same guilt and vices for which he has thought to judge others. Therefore, each should judge only himself, should cautiously, carefully look after himself in everything, and not examine the life and conduct of others” (V, 30).

One key to acquiring other virtues is chastity, which must be of the soul and the body. “We should most fervently struggle not only in continence of body but also in contrition of heart, with frequent sighs of prayer, so that the furnace of our flesh, which the Babylonian king constantly ignites by the arousal of fleshly lust, may be put out by the dew of the Holy Spirit which descends into our heart” (VI, 17). “It is possible to acquire purity without the gift of knowledge, but it is impossible to acquire spiritual knowledge without the purity of chastity” (VI, 18).

Eight of the twelve books of the *Institutes* are devoted to a description of the eight primary vices and the struggle the monk must make against them. These eight are gluttony, fornication, love of money, anger, sorrow, despondency, vainglory, and pride. These chapters are very practical and contain numerous instructive examples taken from the experience of the

Desert Fathers. One memorable example among these, illustrating the sin of vainglory, may be taken as an apt warning against the tendency, so present in 20th-century monastic aspirants also, of spiritual fakery and “posing” based on an elementary self-love and idleness.

“When I lived in the desert of Scetis, I remember an elder who, going to the cell of a certain brother for a visit, when he drew near to the door and heard him saying something inside, stopped a little, desiring to find out whether he was reading from the Sacred Scripture or, as was the custom, was reciting something from memory while working. When this pious tester, putting his ear close, heard more clearly, he discovered that the brother had been so deceived by the spirit of vainglory that he pretended to be delivering a sermon of admonishment to the people in the church. When the elder, continuing to stand, heard that he had finished the sermon and, changing his role, was giving the deacon’s dismissal to the catechumens — he knocked on the door. The brother met the elder with his usual respect and, leading him in, being wounded in conscience for his dreams, asked whether he had been there for a long time or whether, standing for a long time at the door, he had endured some unpleasantness. The elder, joking, tenderly replied: I came when you were giving the dismissal to the catechumens” (XI, 15). The fantasies of 20th-century monastic aspirants are not far from this classic example!

As for the chief of the vices or passions, pride, St. Cassian is, as always, down-to-earth and practical and spends most of this chapter describing the lower or “fleshly” type of pride that is one of the commonest pitfalls for monastic aspirants, ancient as well as modern. “This fleshly pride, when it settles in the soul of a monk who has placed a cold or bad beginning to his renunciation of the world, not allowing him because of his former worldly arrogance to come to the humility of Christ, at first makes him insubmissive and stubborn, then does not allow him to be meek and affable, as likewise to be equal with the brethren and sociable, nor to leave all possessions and remain in poverty according to the commandment of our God and Saviour . . . He does not wish to bear the burden of the monastery’s life and does not accept the instruction of any elder. For whoever is possessed by the passion of pride not only considers it unworthy of him to observe any kind of rule of submission or obedience but does not even allow into his ears the very teaching concerning perfection; in his heart, there grows such a repulsion for spiritual words that when such a conversation takes place his gaze cannot stay in one place, but his wandering look is directed this way and that, the eyes turned the other way, obliquely . . . As long as the spiritual conversation continues, he imagines that he is sitting on crawling worms or sharp sticks, and no matter what the simple conversation might utter for the edification of the hearers, the proud one thinks that this is said to put him to shame. And the whole time the talk on spiritual life is taking place, he, being occupied with

his own suspicions, catches and intercepts not what he should accept for his own advancement, but with preoccupied mind seeks out the reason why this or the other is being said, or with secret disturbance of the heart he invents what he might reply to them; so that from a soulsaving inquiry he can receive nothing at all, or correct himself in any way” (XII, 25, 27). As an example of this lower kind of pride: ‘I had heard that in this very country (something strange and shameful to relate) one of the younger ones, when his Abba began to rebuke him, asking why he had begun to abandon the humility which he had preserved for such a short time after renouncing the world and had become arrogant with diabolical pride, replied with extreme haughtiness: ‘Did I really humble myself for a time so as to be *always* in submission? At this brazen, criminal reply, the elder was so astonished that all talk was cut off as if he had received these words uttered from Lucifer himself” (XII, 28).

The aim of all this monastic warfare and struggle, which St. Cassian describes so concretely, is to raise one’s mind to the eternal and unchanging and prepare one for the blessedness of the Kingdom of Heaven. ‘The work of the monk’s calling is nothing else than the contemplation of divine purity, which surpasses everything” (IX, 3). “We can in no way despise the satisfaction of the food before us unless the mind, giving itself over to Divine contemplation, shall take greater enjoyment of the love of virtue and the beauty of heavenly objects. And thus, everyone shall despise everything here below as quickly passing away, when he uninterruptedly directs the gaze of his mind towards the unwavering and eternal, and when, still being in the body, he will contemplate the blessedness of the future life’ (V, 14).

The monastic aspirant who allows earthly things or his own passions to draw him away from heavenly things is invariably entangled in the things here below and perishes; St. Cassian’s warning regarding this is equally applicable to our own day. “The mind of a lover of idleness has nothing else to think about than only food and the belly, until, having contracted a friendship with some man or woman, who an identical coldness has weakened, he binds himself with their doings and needs, and thus little by little becomes entangled in harmful occupations, as it were is constrained by serpentine meanderings, and finally is in no condition to untie himself in order to acquire the perfection of his earlier (monastic) vow’ (IX, 6).

Therefore, St. Cassian gives an inspiring word of encouragement to those who wish to follow the monastic life to its goal. “Know that you are in the number of the few who are chosen, and beholding the example and the coldness of the many, do not grow cool, but live as the few live so that with these few you might be vouchsafed the Kingdom of Heaven. For many are called, but few are chosen, and small is the flock to whom the Father has been pleased to give the Kingdom” (IV, 38).

The foundation of this whole monastic struggle is *humility* and *fear of God*, without which all ascetic labours are vain and empty: “If we wish to bring our (spiritual) building to completion so that it might be perfect and pleasing to God, let us hasten to place its foundation not according to the will of our passion, but according to the precise teaching of the Gospel; this foundation can be nothing else than the fear of God and humility, which latter proceeds from meekness and simplicity of heart. Humility cannot be acquired without (spiritual) nakedness. Without the latter, one can in no way acquire either readiness for submission, nor the strength for patience, nor the calmness of meekness, nor the perfection of love, without which things our heart can not at all be the dwelling of the Holy Spirit” (XII, 31). “It is precisely necessary that in the beginning, with a sincere disposition of heart, we should manifest true humility to our brethren, taking care not to offend or grieve in any way, something we can in no way fulfill if there will not be established in us, out of love for Christ, true self-renunciation, which consists in the abandoning of all possessions and non-acquisitiveness; and then, if we will not take up the yoke of obedience and submission with a simple heart, without any pretense, so that no will of our own should live in us at all, apart from the Abba’s orders. This can be done only by one who considers himself not only dead for this world, but also foolish and stupid, and will fulfill all that the elder commands him without any investigation, considering this as sacred and as announced by God” (XII, 32):

Finally, the struggler must be fully aware that the attainment of his goal — victory over the passions and the salvation of the soul — comes not from his own efforts, as essential as they are, but from the grace of God. “It is impossible for anyone to be perfectly cleansed of fleshly vices unless he is aware that all his labours and striving cannot be sufficient to attain such perfection, and unless he becomes convinced that he attains it not otherwise than by the mercy and with the help of God” (XII, 13). “The attainment of perfection is the work not of the one who desires or struggles, but of the merciful God (Rom. 9:16), who makes us victors over vices not at all as a reward for the merit of our labours or struggle . . . The action of every good thing proceeds from the grace of God, Who has given us with great bounty such an eternity of blessedness and limitless glory for our weak fervour and our short, small struggle’ (XII, 11). The whole book of the *Institutes* ends with the following words: “We must acknowledge that we in ourselves, without the help of God’s grace, can do nothing at all with regard to the doing of virtues, and we must be assured in truth that even that which we have been vouchsafed to understand is the gift of God” (XII, 33).

It may be seen from this brief exposition of the *Institutes*’ teaching that the monastic life in 5th and 6th century Gaul had a solid foundation under it. The teaching of St. Cassian is not

for idle dreamers or those fleeing from the responsibilities of life in the world. With its sober, down-to-earth tone and its insistence on work, ascetic struggle, and coming to know and overcome one's own passions, it is rather a manual for serious, energetic, determined Christian fighters who are looking for *greater*, not lesser, struggles than the Christian finds in normal worldly life.

It is, above all, the *Institutes* that set the tone for the monasticism of this period. St. Gregory of Tours himself, when he had occasion to give spiritual instruction to a recluse of his diocese, “sent him books with the Lives of the Fathers and the Institutes of the Monks, so that he might learn what recluses ought to be and with what prudence monks ought to behave. When he had read and re-read them, not only did he drive out of his mind the bad thoughts which he had had, but even more it so developed his knowledge that he astonished us with his facility in speaking of these matters” (*Life of the Fathers*, XX, 3). These same two books (as we shall see below) are the ones that St. Romanus took with him when he set out for his hermit's life in the Jura mountains. But even apart from its direct influence on monastic aspirants, the *Institutes* may be seen also clearly reflected in the teaching of the monastic Fathers of Gaul who came after him.

SAINT FAUSTUS OF LERINS



Chief of the monastic Fathers of Gaul in the 5th century, after St. Cassian himself, was St. Faustus (+490), who was abbot of Lerins during the last years of St. Cassian's lifetime and was later Bishop of Rhegium (Riez), less than a hundred miles north of Marseilles.

Noted for his defence of the “Eastern” teachings on such questions as the relative corporeality of the soul (God alone being perfectly incorporeal) and grace and free will (and probably for this reason much neglected in the later West), he was first and foremost a teacher of monastic life and had more direct influence on the great monastic Father of the 6th century, St. Caesarius of Arles, than did St. Cassian. (Citations here are from Abbe Alliez, [*Histoire du Monastere de Lerins*](#), Vol. 1 (Paris, 1861); and A. Malnory, [*Saint Cesaire. Eveque a' Arles*](#), Paris, 1894.)

In his instructions to his monks, he has the same emphasis as St. Cassian on unremitting struggle and the avoidance of idleness and repose: “It is not at all for peace and quiet, not for

security, that you have come to this island, but rather to struggle and combat vigorously . . . We have come to these remote shores, into the ranks of this spiritual army, in order to struggle every day against our passions . . . Our profession obliges us to reject all that the present life can offer of consolation or of glory. The sweetest things of the earth should be foreign to us; our thoughts should be intent solely on the eternal rewards which are promised us. To rejoice at living in dependence and wretchedness, to seek fervently poverty, to uproot from our hearts not only the attachment to created things but the will itself — these are our means to perfection” (Homily *Ad monachos* 1). “A ship, after having braved the billows of the open sea, can be in danger even in the middle of what seems the safest port and is in peril of sinking there. Likewise, in the refuge of religion to which the Saviour has led you, do not be without fear; force yourselves, with the help of Christ, to avoid the least negligence, the slightest faults; they act on the soul like drops of water entering a ship’s keel by imperceptible fissures” (*Ad monachos* II).



St. Cassian's Monastery of St. Victor, overlooking the Port of Marseilles.



Atrium of the ancient basilica The first hermitage of St. Honoratus: of St. Cassian's Monastery

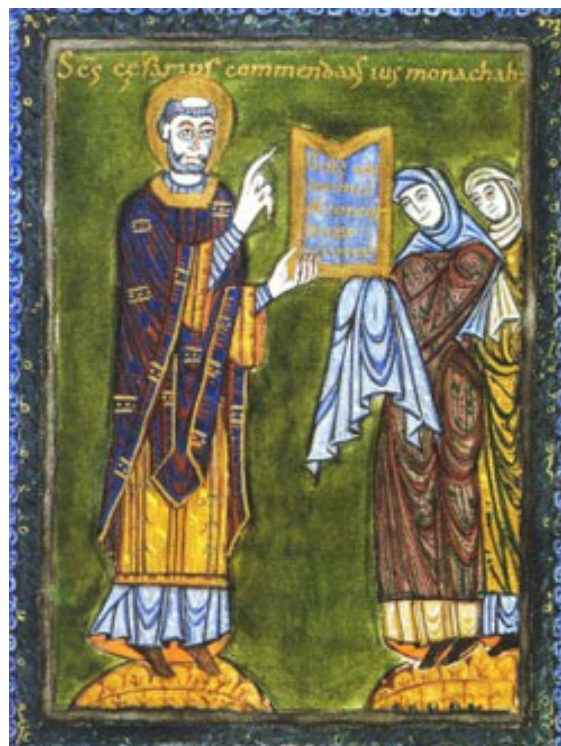
With St. Cassian, St. Faustus teaches the *inward* nature of the monastic struggle. “Of what benefit is it to live in this silent place if one suffers within oneself the torment of the passions? Will there be tranquillity without and a storm within? Is it worth the trouble of abandoning the world which is down there far away, in order to keep the passions shut up in oneself? (Homily *Sicut a nobis*).

Above all, St. Faustus, like St. Cassian, emphasizes the virtue of obedience and the ruinousness of disobedience and pride. “The strength which the work of salvation requires, God refuses to him who does not know how to obey . . . Obedience is a necessity for youth, and at the same time, old age finds therein its glory ... The habit of disobedience obscures intelligence and falsifies judgment. The heart of the guilty one becomes so hard that, if he does not by an extreme effort suddenly humble himself in order to correct his fault, he will dare to battle against his superior, will go on to insult him and say: How strongly I resisted! How well I did to disobey! With what haughtiness I replied! He believed that I would *always* humble myself before him!” (Homily VII).

St. Faustus, seeing the rapidly growing monastic movement of Gaul, also saw the tragedy of “runaway” monks — those who had tasted the monastic life but did not have the patience to persevere in it. His forceful words on remaining in the monastery where one has made one’s renunciation of the world anticipate the emphasis on monastic *stability* in the

6th-century Fathers, St. Caesarius of Arles and St. Benedict of Nursia. Referring to the sea around Lerins, he told his monks: “This sea is the world; the monastery is the harbour. What should the true monk propose for himself? — to fix his anchor forever in the harbour. Would he return to the world? These rocks, against which the sea is breaking down there, are the image of the reefs against which the monk inconstant in his path is sure of breaking himself”? (Homily, *Sicut a nobis*). “What in truth is crueller than to uproot yourself so suddenly, like a migrating bird, from the place where your God has called you, where He illumined you with the first rays of His light, and which He opened up to you like a harbour against the raging of the storm? Do you so quickly forget your brothers and companions who applied themselves to console you? Is it thus that you abandon the place where you put off the clothes of this world and changed the name you bore when you were there?... But you are so wanting in good sense as to prefer to the favours of God your own will and whim, and to place yourself at the mercy of your own ideas! Do you not feel to what shipwreck you are rushing?”

The true monastic path, according to St. Fanstus, is one of humility, patience, and obedience, which can change those around one and make the monastic community indeed a paradise on earth. ‘Oh, how blessed by God is he whose humility has diminished the pride of his brother, whose patience has extinguished the wrath of his neighbour, who by his obedience and fervour corrects in others lukewarmness and sloth, whose consoling examples or words restore light in the heart which anger has rendered blind” (*Ad monachos* I).



POET OF THE WESTERN DESERT SAINT EUCHERIUS OF LYONS

In general, the “desert” in 5th and 6th century Gaul refers to the deserted places outside of cities, suitable for the habitation of monks, those who have abandoned worldly ways. There is, however, another more specific meaning of the word “desert,” which St. Cassian uses: the place for those who wish to lead the solitary, anchoritic life away even from the coenobitic or semi-coenobitic communities wherein most monks dwelt. St. Cassian sets forth in the *Institutes* the conditions for entering upon this higher way of life. “We set out to look at a special, higher kind of monks, who are called anchorites. At first, they live for a long time in a community until they learn patience, discernment, humility, and non-acquisition and totally uproot in themselves all vices; then, intending to enter into the fiercest battle with demons, they go away to the remote places of the desert” (V, 36). “The desert should be sought by those who are perfect, cleansed of every vice, and one should go into it after being perfectly cleansed from vices in the community of the brethren, not out of faintheartedness but for Divine contemplation, with the desire of higher vision, which can be acquired only in solitude and only by the perfect” (VIII, 17).

This higher kind of desert life had a definite attraction for the monastic aspirants of St. Gregory’s Gaul, not actually as a separate form of monastic life but as a higher ideal of the one common monastic life. We shall see several such advanced desert-dwellers in the *Life of the Fathers*. Here, above all, however, we must be aware of the context of hard ascetic struggle, usually in a monastery, that invariably precedes such desert-dwelling, as well as the down-to-earth monastic teaching which underlies it. St. Cassian’s *Institutes* are the ABC of this kind of monasticism also, while his *Conferences* contain a more advanced teaching for desert-dwellers (as well as coenobites).

The very idea that the “desert” could be found in Gaul itself was not one that was immediately evident. Even after the example of St. Martin and his disciples, St. Honoratus set out to find his desert in the East; it was only owing to the death of his companion that he returned after travelling only as far as Greece and retired first to a cave on the mainland, and then to the island of Lerins off the coast of southern Gaul, wherewith his followers he founded a monastery as much as possible in the tradition of the East. We do not have a detailed description of his original monastery at Lerins. Still, the few brief references to it show it to be a close imitation of the semi-hermitic lavras of the East. St. Eucherius, disciple of St. Honoratus, describes it as a place of “holy elders living in separate cells.” We have a more detailed description of the same kind of monastery in Sulpicius Severus’ [*Life of St. Martin*](#):



The island of Lerins, with the fortress where the relics of St. Honoratus were treasured for several centuries.

“The place was so secluded and remote that it had all the solitude of the desert. On one side, it was walled in by the rock face of a high mountain, and a gentle bend of the River Loire enclosed the level ground that remained. There was only one approach to it, and that was a very narrow one. His own cell was built of wood, as were those of many of the brethren, but most of them had hollowed out shelters for themselves in the rock of the overhanging mountain. There were about eighty disciples there, being trained in the pattern of their most blessed master. No one possessed anything of his own; everything was put into the common stock ... It was seldom that anyone left his cell except when they assembled at the place of worship.” (*Life of St. Martin*, ch. X, F. R. Hoare translation).

As such monastic settlements grew in 5th-century Gaul, the need to go to Egypt to see the Christian “desert” became less and less urgent. It was, above all, St. Cassian who put to rest the idea of “going to the East” for monastic training when he provided in his books the spiritual teaching of the great elders of Egypt. When he heard that St. Eucherius, even after being in Lerins, was thinking of going to Egypt, he dedicated to him (and to his great Abba, St. Honoratus) seven books of his *Conferences*, with this preface: “O holy brethren, Honoratus and Eucherius, you have become so inflamed by the praise of those exalted men from whom we have received the first instructions of the anchoretic life, that one of you, being head of a great coenobium of brethren, desires that his community, which is edified by the daily sight of your holy life, should be instructed further by the commandments of those

fathers, while the other has desired to set out for Egypt so as to be edified also by seeing them in the body, so that, leaving this region, numbed by the severity of the Gallic frost, he would fly like a pure turtledove to the lands which, being more closely illuminated by the Sun of Righteousness, also abound with mature fruits of virtue. This has involuntarily aroused a love in me so that, being consoled by the desire of the one and the labour of the other, I have not shunned the peril of writing in brief, if only to increase the authority of the former among his monks themselves, and to divert the latter from the necessity of a dangerous voyage” (Preface to Conference XI).

St. Eucherius clearly took the words of St. Cassian to heart. Not only did he not go to Egypt, but he also became the great church poet of the desert of Gaul. Perhaps it is a matter of his (and our) “Western” temperament and experience, or perhaps it is only the “Northern” setting of his writings, made familiar to us in recent centuries by the great monastic strugglers of the “Northern Thebaid” of Russia, down to St. Seraphim of Sarov and other holy monks and nuns right up to our own century — that makes us feel something very kin to us in the writings of St. Eucherius, and in particular his *Praise of the Desert* (*De laude eremi*). Let us quote here from this work, which, albeit in a different way, helps set the tone for the monastic strugglers of 5th and 6th century Gaul, almost as well as St. Cassian’s *Institutes*. This little book is not one of monastic *teaching* as such but gives us a good view of the impulse of the soul, which inspired young men (and women) to go to the desert in the Gaul of his time (Citations from an unpublished manuscript translation by James Graves.)

“Let him who burns with divine fire abandon his abode in order to choose the desert; let him prefer it to his close ones, his children . . . For the _ Christian who abandons his native soil, let the desert become a temporary fatherland, from which let nothing call him back, neither fear, nor desires, nor joy, nor sorrows. Yes, one can well pay for the happiness of solitude by the sacrifice of all that one loves.”

“How sweet, for those who thirst after God, are these remote solitudes with their forests! For those who thirst after Christ, how pleasant are those retreats, extending far and wide, where only nature wakes! All things are hushed. Then, as if under the goad of silence, the mind is aroused joyfully towards its God and quickens with unutterable transports. No shrill distraction is met there, no word, except perchance with God. That sweet din alone breaks in amid the hush of the remote abode. An uproar sweeter than silence interrupts that state of placid silence, a holy tumult of modest converse . . . Then the deceitful enemy roars vainly like a wolf within the folds where the sheep have been penned. Back and forth along Jacob’s wondrous ladder, a choir of rejoicing angels makes a watchful call upon the desert expanse and illumines the solitude with the thronging of unseen visitation (Gen. 28:12). Moreover, lest

those who guard the city stand their watch in vain, Christ guards and hedges His property within. He wards off its foes from the circuit of the desert in such a way that, though God's adopted people lie exposed to the expanse of the desert, yet they are hedged from their foes. Within, moreover, the Bridegroom reclines in that noontide, and the desert dwellers, wounded by His loving-kindness, contemplate Him, saying, *We have found Whom our soul loveth. We shall hold Him, nor shall we let Him go*" (Cant. 3:4) (chs. 37, 38).

"The soil of the desert is not unfruitful, though it is commonly thought to be so.... In the desert, the husbandman reaps harvests bearing a rich yield ... In that place is found the bread of life, which descends from heaven. Amid those crags, burst forth refreshing fountains, even the living waters, with the power to quench not only the thirst for water but the thirst for salvation as well. Here is the meadow and the pleasure of the inward man . . . The same desert of the body is the paradise of the soul" (ch. 39).

"Rightly then, O land deserving reverence, you have come forth as a dwelling lately fit for habitation by the saints who dwell in your confines . . . Whoever has sought out your brotherhood of saints has found God. Each who has cultivated you has found Christ in you. He who dwells in you rejoices in the Lord Who dwells there also; the same man is at once your possessor and a divine possession. He who does not flee your dwelling becomes himself a temple of God" (ch. 41).

"Indeed, to all deserts illumined by the retreats of the pious, I owe meet honour. Yet before all others, I embrace my Lerins, which receives in its most pious arms those who come there scattered by the shipwrecks of the stormy world. Those tossed by the billows of the world it leads gently within its shades, so they may catch their panting breath within that inward shade of the Lord. Bubbling with streams, green with grass, bright with vineyards, joyful in its sights and scents, it reveals itself as a paradise for those who possess it. . . It now has those wondrous holy elders who, living in separate cells, have brought the Egyptian Fathers to our Gaul" (ch. 42).

"What gatherings and assemblies of saints, O good Jesus, have I myself seen there, fragrant with the precious scent of sweet ointments in boxes of alabaster! The fragrance of life breathes everywhere. They prefer the inward man's appearance to the outer one's garb. Strengthened in lovingkindness, downcast in lowliness, most gentle in piety, most strong in faith, modest in gait, swift in obedience, silent upon encounter, majestically serene in feature: in a word, they display ranks of angelic peace in unremitting contemplation. They long for nothing, they desire nothing, save only when they long for Him Whom alone they desire.

While they seek a blessed life, they live it, and even while they strive after it presently, already they achieve it.

“Do they wish, then, to be set apart from sinners? They have already been set apart. Do they choose to possess a life that is pure? They possess it. Do they strive to keep all their time for the praises of God? They keep it. Do they yearn to rejoice in the gatherings of saints? They rejoice in them. Do they desire to enjoy Christ? They enjoy Him. Are they eager to gain the life of the desert? In their heart, they gain it. Thus, through the most bountiful grace of Christ, here and now, they earn many of those blessings which they long for in the time to come. While following the hope, though at a distance, they seize its substance now. Even their toil itself brings great reward, for their future recompense lies, as it were, within their present work” (ch. 43).

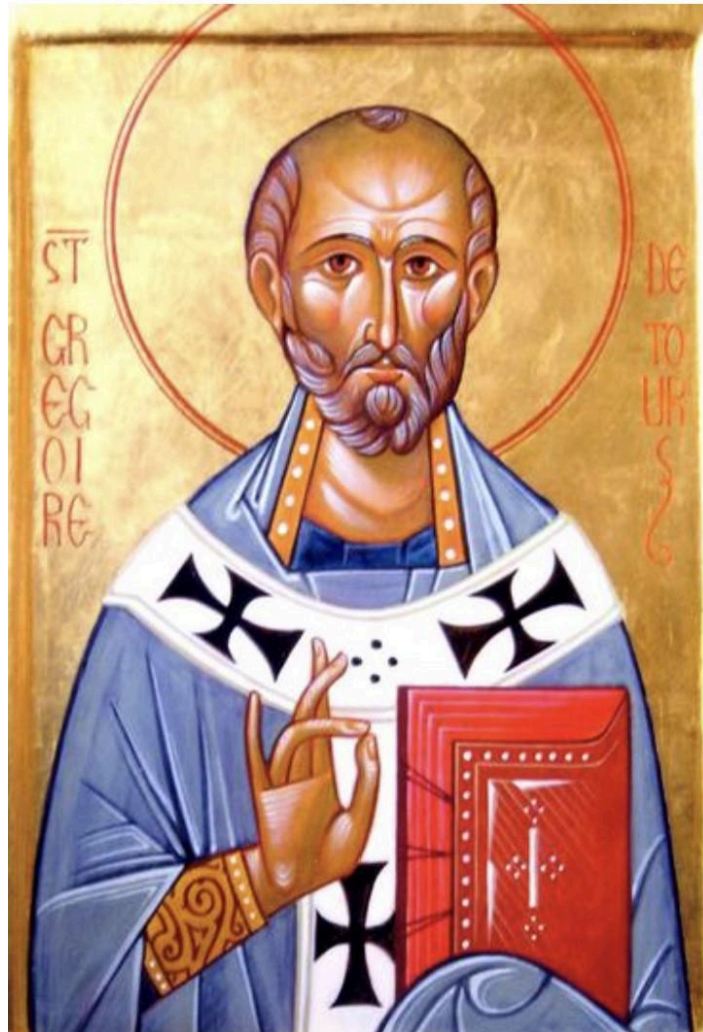
Lest it be thought that this lavish “‘praise of the desert’” is some kind of “Western romanticism,” let us put beside it the words of the great monastic Father of the East in the preceding century, St. Basil the Great (as quoted in the Life of the great Father of Russia’s “Northern Thebaid,” Elder Nazarius of Valaam). Inspired by the outwardly very different deserts of Egypt and Cappadocia, St. Basil sees, just like the Western poet, the same *paradise of the heart* of him who has abandoned everything for God:

“O life of solitude, house of heavenly learning and divine knowledge, school wherein God is everything that we learn! O desert of sweetness, where fragrant flowers of love now blaze with fiery colour, now shine with snow-like purity. With them is peace and quiet, and those who live beneath them remain unmoved by the wind. There, is the incense of complete mortification, not only of flesh, but what is more praiseworthy, of the will itself, and the censor of perpetual prayer burns ceaselessly with the fire of divine love. There, are diverse flowers of virtue, resplendent with diverse adornments, blossoming with the grace of unfading beauty. O desert, the delight of holy souls, the paradise of inexhaustible sweetness! Thou art a furnace, the power of whose blazing flame the Three Youths make cool by prayer, and by means of burning faith, they extinguish around themselves the fierce flame in which both arrows and chains burn away, but those in chains do not burn, only the bonds of sin are loosed, and the soul is led up to the singing of divine praise, *exulting*: Thou has burst my bonds asunder, I will offer Thee the sacrifice of praise” (Ps. 115:7-8).

Love for the desert, as a refuge from the storms and occupations of the world and a place of intense spiritual combat for the sake of the heavenly kingdom, and reverence before the holy monks who dwelt there and were already making the lands of the West fragrant with their deeds of asceticism and piety — these were the impulses which inspired the young,

newly-converted Christians of the West to seek out the deserts of Gaul and learn there at first hand, from experienced elders and in their own practice, the spiritual teaching of the Eastern Fathers. There were many casualties and spiritual disasters, as the very ferocity of the battle would promise, but those who persevered against all obstacles and truly planted the seeds of Eastern monasticism in Western soil have left a fragrant memory and example which is not dead even today, for those who wish to seek it out and be inspired by it.

Of the lives of the early desert-dwellers of Gaul, none is so fascinating and inspiring as the one with which St. Gregory begins the *Life of the Fathers*: the Life of Sts. Romanus and Lupicinus. As it happens, there exists a much longer *Life* of these Fathers than St. Gregory's, written in their monastery within a few decades of their death. This *Life* gives the most detailed account we have of the early monastic fervour of Gaul, and a summary of it will give the most fitting completion for this introduction to the Orthodox Gaul of St. Gregory.



St. Gregory of Tours.

Saints Romanus and Lupicinus: The Desert-Dwellers of the Jura

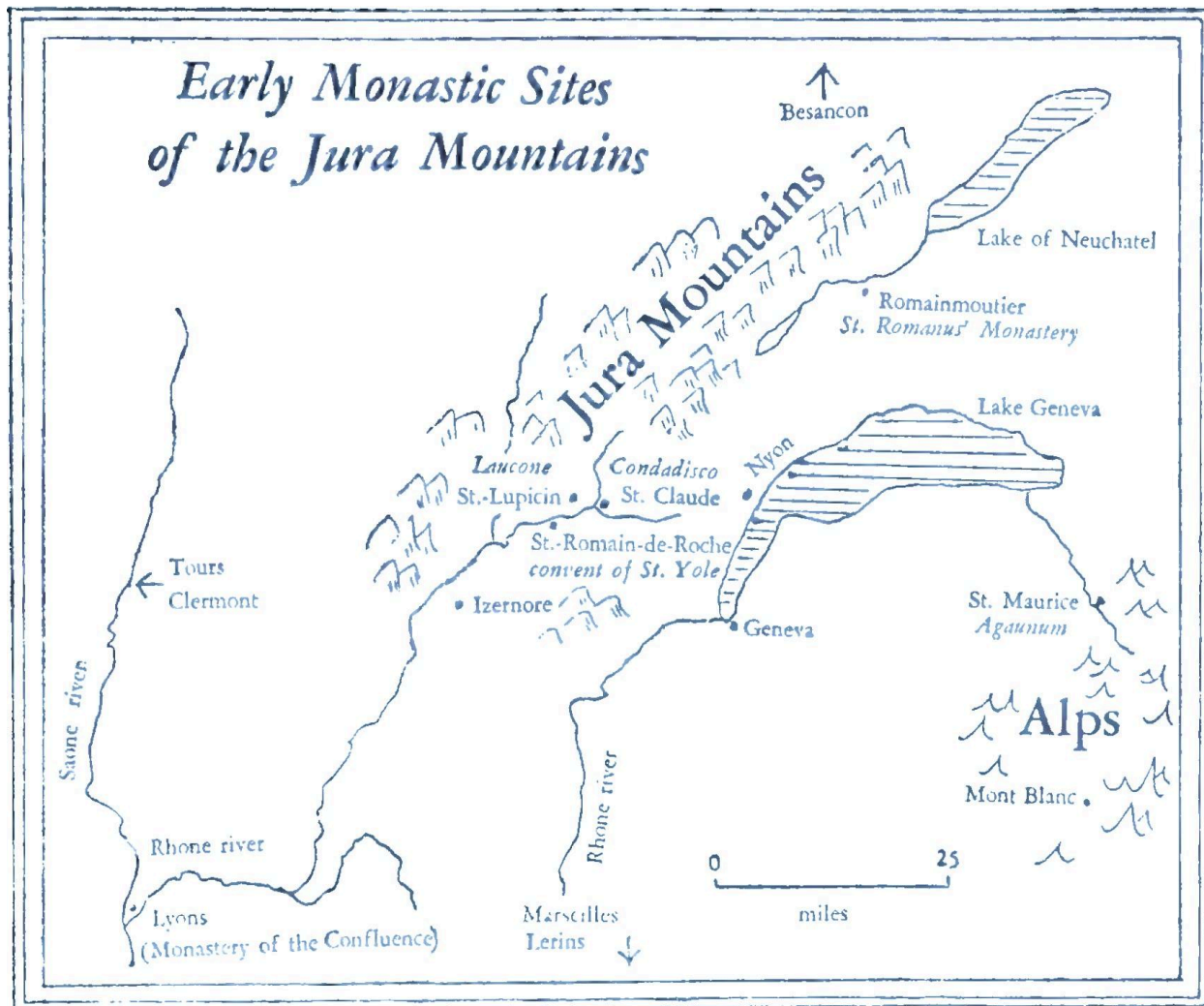


Fourth-century Gaul had St. Martin with his ascetic prodigies and his communities of anchorites; the turn of the new century saw the foundation of the island monastery of Lerins, which brought the tradition of the Egyptian Fathers to Gaul and produced a number of bishops and monastic founders; the first decades of the 5th century saw the establishment of numerous monastic communities in the south of Gaul, usually near cities and often founded by bishops, and the spread of the Eastern monastic rule and teaching through the writings of St. Cassian. By the end of St. Cassian's life (434), Orthodox monasticism was thus already well-established in Gaul.

Then occurred a phenomenon which is familiar to us from the later history of the "Northern Thebaid" of Russia from the 14th to the 17th centuries: the flight of monks and monastic aspirants not only from cities and other inhabited centers but even from established monasteries, into the absolute isolation of the forested wilderness of Gaul. Doubtless, such books as St. Eucherius' *Praise of the Desert* had an influence on this movement; but the main impulse was the same one that had produced the original flight to the Egyptian desert a century earlier: the elementary Christian impulse to give up everything for God, to abandon all things and influences of this world in order the better to prepare oneself for the Kingdom of Heaven.

Among the first of such desert-dwellers who literally turned the "deserts" of Gaul into cities populated with armies of monks were Sts. Romanus and Lupicinus. It is not by accident that St. Gregory begins his *Life of the Fathers* with them, for already before his time, their exploits had become legendary in Gaul, and they were taken as the purest examples of the monastic desert life. Their Lives, together with the Life of their disciple St. Eugendus, were written by an anonymous disciple of the latter about the year 520. This document, the [*Life of the Jura Fathers \(Vita Patrum Jurensium\)*](#), gives not only a much more detailed account of the Lives of Sts. Romanus and Lupicinus than does St. Gregory, but also furnish invaluable information on the monastic teaching of these Fathers, on the monastic life in general in 5th-century Gaul, and on the everyday life and the growth of the Jura monasteries during the first 75 years or so of their existence. The following pages summarize the parts of this

document that best illustrate these points, with citations from it according to chapter, as a supplement to chapter one of the *Life of the Fathers*. (Francois Martine, [*Vie des Peres du Jura*](#), Paris, 1968, Latin and French text with copious notes; other information, and almost all illustrations, are taken from the thorough historical work of Paul Benoit: [*Histoire de l'Abbaye et de la Terre de Saint-Claude*](#), Montreuil-sur-Mer, 1890, 2 vols.)



The Jura is a mountain range in eastern France, near the Swiss border, some hundred miles long and twenty or thirty wide. While not as spectacular as the Alps, which are visible in spots to the east, these mountains have a rugged beauty of their own. They proceed from west to east in three “steps,” each about 1000 feet higher than the one below, from the plains to the “high Jura,” which is a mountainous plateau of peaks and gorges, with elevations up to 5500 feet. Even today, the mountains are covered with fir forests, numerous waterfalls, lakes, and treacherous streams. The towns now occupying the sites of the original monastic

settlements are tourist centers for activities such as fishing and camping in summer, and skiing in winter, when the mountains are covered with deep snows.

In early Roman times the lower parts of the Jura had inhabited towns, but the “high Jura” — which Julius Caesar described as *Jura mons altissimus* — was totally uninhabited. With the wane of Roman power and the incursions of barbarians, the population of this area declined, and the forests quickly overgrew much of the land that had been taken from them by the advancing Roman civilization. By the 5th century, when the wild Burgundians and Franks roamed this part of Gaul, only a few of the old towns were left; they were largely Christian, and the old pagan temples here were already in ruins.

Near one of these towns, all three of the Jura Fathers were born. St. Eugendus, as the *Life* states (ch. 119), was born not far from Izernore, the site of an important pagan temple dedicated to the god Mercury, which had been partially destroyed (its ruins may still be seen today), and he was a “fellow-citizen” of St. Romanus and Lupicinus, who were thus born either here or in a nearby village.



Ruins of the pagan temple at Izernore, near the birthplace of the Jura saints.

St. Romanus was the elder brother of St. Lupicinus and was the first to go into the wilderness (St. Gregory’s account is much more general and omits details like this). He was born probably in the last decade of the 4th century, the decade of the death of St. Martin. “Before him in this province, no kind of monk had devoted himself either to the solitary life

or the life in common” (ch. 5). Concerning his monastic preparation the Life devotes only one sentence: “Before embracing the religious life, he had known the venerable Sabinus, Abba of the (Monastery of the) Confluence of Lyons, as well as his strenuous rule and the life of his monks; then, like a bee in search of booty, after having gathered from each of them the flowers of their perfections, he returned to where he came from” (ch. 11). Nothing more is known of this Abba Sabinus, nor is it known of which of the several island monasteries of Lyons (which is situated at the “confluence” of the Saone and Rhone rivers) he was Abba. It is known, however, that Lyons, some 200 miles inland from Marseilles, was already a monastic center early in the 5th century; a disciple of St. Martin of Tours, St. Maximus (whose brief Life is given by St. Gregory in his [*Glory of the Confessors*](#), ch. 22), was for a time in one of the island monasteries. St. Eucherius, author of the *Praise of the Desert*, became bishop of Lyons in about 434 and was known to spend the time of Lent in one of these monasteries in prayer, fasting, and the writing of books. Judging from the information given in the Life, St. Romanus could have been in Lyons during the episcopacy of St. Eucherius, although it is more likely that he was there a few years before it; in any case, he could have read the *Praise of the Desert*, which was written in about 428, before leaving himself for the wilderness. His reason for going to Lyons was probably a simple one. Most likely, it had the nearest monastery to his home, being no more than a hundred miles from the Jura mountains and being connected with them by the river Rhone and its tributaries.



The forested Alps of Eastern France adjoining the Jura Mountains—the habitat of St Romanus and Lupicinas.



Forest of the Jura.

It is not stated that St. Romanus became a monk in this monastery, only that he received his knowledge of monasticism there. And then, “ from this monastery, without manifesting anything of his most holy aspirations, he took the book of the *Life of the Holy Fathers* and the remarkable institutes of the Abbas” (ch. 11). The first book was undoubtedly one of the then-circulating Latin accounts of the Egyptian Fathers; the second book was certainly St. Cassian’s *Institutes*. With these, and his exposure to monasticism in practice under the Abba Sabinus, he had all the theoretical basis he needed for the monastic life.

He set out, not for any distant place, but for the wilderness close to his own home. What did he hope to achieve by this? Why did he not stay in an established monastic community or seek out one with more renowned elders, such as Lerins? Everything in the Life of St. Romanus seems to indicate that he had no religious “romanticism” whatsoever: he did not dream of far-away lands, “ideal monasteries,” or “holy elders.” He thought of only one thing: how to save his soul and prepare for the heavenly kingdom on the solid foundation of the ABCs of spiritual life and strict monastic practice. His simple Christian upbringing had prepared him for this: “He was not particularly educated, but, a rarer merit, he was endowed

with purity, with an unequalled loving kindness, to such a degree that one does not see him in childhood giving himself over to childish pranks, nor in mature years becoming enslaved to human passions and to the bonds of marriage' (ch. 5). This simple village boy from the mountain provinces, once his heart had been inflamed in mature years with the ideal of Christian perfection and he had learned the basic principles of monastic life, had no thought but to go and practice what he had learned in the nearest suitable place. And so it was that, "in about his 35th year, attracted by the solitudes of the desert, after having left his mother, his sister and his brother, he penetrated into the forests of the Jura near to his home' (ch. 5). In fact, the place where he finally settled is about 20 miles as the crow flies from his native town of Izernore — close enough to be found out later by venturesome spirits like himself, but far enough away to be quite remote from and inaccessible to the world.

"Going about in all directions through these forests, which were suitable and favourable for his way of life, he ended by finding, farther on, amidst valleys bordered by cliffs, an exposed place suitable for tilling. There, the abrupt sides of three mountains turn aside a little the one from the other, leaving between them a flat place of some extent. Since the beds of two courses of water come together in this place, the site which thus constituted a unique river-bank was soon popularly called Condadisco" (ch. 6). Condadisco ("Condat" in French, derived from a Celtic word meaning "confluence") is the present town of St.-Claude (named after a 7th-century abbot-bishop of the monastery), located at the confluence of the Bienne and Tacon rivers (tributaries of the Rhone); it lasted as a monastic community until the 18th century.

"The new lodger, seeking a dwelling corresponding to his ardent desire, found on the eastern side, at the foot of a rocky mountain, a most densely-growing fir which, arranging its boughs in a circle, covered the disciple of Paul as before the palm had covered Paul himself" (ch. 7). In recalling the palm which, in Blessed Jerome's *Life of Paul the First Hermit* (ch. 5), was the dwelling place of the first monk of Egypt, and in calling St. Romanus the "disciple of Paul," the author of the *Life of the Jura Fathers* shows the Eastern roots of the desert-dwellers of Gaul; and the forest fir, as opposed to the desert palm, reveals the different Western locale of the same monastic struggle. The "rocky mountain" is the one presently known as "Le Bayard," which towers over the town of St.-Claude.

"Thus the fir furnished him, against the heat of mid-summer and the coldness of rains, a roof continually green. . . In addition, there were several wild bushes that provided their berries, sour for pleasure lovers, no doubt, but sweet for those whose senses are at peace...if anyone should decide, with an audacious boldness, to cut across these trackless solitudes, not to mention the density of the forest and its heaps of fallen trees, the very high ridges where

deer lived and the steep ravines of the bucks would scarcely permit such a man, even if robust and agile, to make the journey” (chs. 8, 9).



The way into the Jura



Cascade des Planches — a waterfall of the Jura.



The river Bienne is just below Condadisco.

St. Romanus settled down for the monastic life of struggle in this wild and inaccessible place, determined never to leave. Being practical and not a “dreamer,” he did not hope to gain his daily food entirely from what the forest could provide but brought with him the minimum necessary for a small garden. “Having brought seeds and a pickax, the blessed one began in this place while devoting himself assiduously to prayer and reading to satisfy the needs of a modest existence by manual labour, according to the monastic institution. He was in great abundance, for he had need of nothing; he gave enough, for he had nothing to put away for the poor; he did not set foot beyond his retreat; he returned no more to his home as a true hermit, he laboured so as to provide his own living” (ch. 10).

What a lesson and what a wealth of inspiration for the monastic aspirants of the 20th century! With modern means of communication, the very idea of *losing oneself from the eyes of the world* has been all but forgotten, and to live in one place for one’s whole life is almost unheard of. Later, St. Romanus did travel on monastery business throughout the Jura Mountains and as far as Geneva and beyond (journeys of no more than a hundred miles). Still, his disciple, St. Eugendus, provided a perfect example of monastic stability from the time when he came to Condadisco at the age of seven to his death more than fifty years later; he never once left the monastery (ch. 126). If we are helpless to imitate such stability today, let us at least understand its importance: Christianity in practice, and monasticism above all, is a matter of *staying in one place and struggling with all one’s heart* for the Kingdom of Heaven. One may be called to do the work of God elsewhere or may be moved about by unavoidable circumstances. Still, without the basic and profound desire to endure everything for God in one place without running away, one will scarcely be able to put down the roots required in order to bring forth spiritual fruits. Unfortunately, with the ease of modern communications, one may even sit in one spot and *still* concern oneself with everything but the one thing needful — with everyone else’s business, with all the church gossip, and not with the concentrated labour needed to save one’s own soul in this evil world.

In a famous passage of the *Institutes*, St. Cassian warns the monks of his time to ‘flee women and bishops, for neither the one nor the other will allow one anymore to have repose in one’s cell, or to be occupied with the thought of God, to behold holy objects with pure eyes’ (XI, 17). Women, of course, are tempted by means of the flesh and bishops by means of ordination to the priesthood and, in general, by the vainglory of acquaintance with those in high positions. Today, this warning remains timely, but for the monks of the 20th century, one can add a further warning: Flee from telephones, travelling, and gossip — those forms of communication which most of all bind one to the world — for they will cool your ardour and make you, even in your monastic cell, the plaything of worldly desires and influences!

“In this place, the imitator of Anthony, the ancient hermit, took delight for a long time in an angelic life and, apart from heavenly vision, enjoyed the sight of nothing but wild beasts and, rarely, hunters. But then his venerable brother Lupicinus, younger than he by birth but soon his equal in sanctity, informed at night by his brother in a dream, abandoned for the love of Christ those whom the blessed Romanus had already abandoned, his sister and mother, and with warm desire reached the dwelling of his brother and adopted his way of life. . . In this humble nest, in this remote corner of the desert, these two conceived, by inspiration of the Divine Word, a spiritual posterity and distributed a little on all sides to the monasteries and churches of Christ, the fruit of their chaste childbearing” (ch. 12). Thus, with the arrival of the second brother, a community was formed. The news of this began to attract others. The first to join them were two young clerics (probably from the lower orders, Readers or Sub-deacons) from Nyon (near Geneva), and already the ““cradle of the saints,” the fir tree, was found to be too small for their life and prayer, and the first buildings had to be erected. ‘They established themselves not far from the tree, on a sort of small hill with a gentle slope where now is to be found, as a remembrance, the oratory reserved for monastic prayer; after having hewn with an axe and polished with the greatest care some pieces of wood, they constructed huts for themselves and prepared others for those who would: come’ (ch. 13). The 14th-century cathedral in the town of St.-Claude now occupies the site of this oratory.

From this time on, the community began to grow rapidly, and people from around the world also began to come on pilgrimage. “Crowds of believers fled the world in order to follow, for the Lord, the vocation of renunciation and perfection. Some came there to behold the new institution's marvels and report, when they returned home, the good gift of its example. Others brought people tormented with demons there so that the prayer of the saints, joined to their own faith, might heal them; the insane and paralytics were also brought. Most of these sick ones, after recovering their health, returned home, but others remained in the monastery. . . Issued from the two founders, the holy community . . . developed in the unity of faith and love . . . Not only the remote regions of the province of Sequanie (the Jura region) but many distant lands also were filled by the holy propagation of this divine race, with monasteries and churches” (chs. 14-16). We know of one of the pilgrims to the Jura from the letters of the celebrated bishop of Clermont (the birthplace of St. Gregory of Tours), Sidonius Apollinaris. Writing to a certain Domnulus in about the year 470, he indicates in a passing reference the renown that the Jura monasteries then enjoyed in Gaul: “And now, unless the monasteries of the Jura keep you, where you love to ascend as if in a foretaste of a celestial habitation, this letter ought to reach you. . .” (O.M. Dalton, [*The Letters of Sidonius*](#), Oxford, 1915, Book IV, 25).]



In the year 444 (the only precise date in the *Life of the Jura Fathers*), St. Hilary of Arles (himself a disciple of St. Honoratus of Lerins) travelled to Besancon at the edge of the Jura in connection with the famous dispute mentioned earlier in this Introduction (the author of the *Life* takes the side of Pope St. Leo in this dispute). Having heard of the renown of Sts. Romanus and Lupicinus, “he summoned the blessed Romanus, not far from the town of Besancon, through clerics sent for this purpose. Exalting, in a magnificent eulogy, his initiative and his way of life, he conferred on him the honour of the priesthood and let him return, heaped with honour, to the monastery” (ch. 18). This was perhaps some fifteen years from the time of St. Romanus’ undertaking of the hermitic life when he must have

been about fifty years old. Roman Catholic scholars generally assume that there must have been a number of priests already in the flourishing community, having in mind the later Latin practice. But we must remember that the monastic inspiration of the Jura Fathers comes from the East, where there were many monasteries without any priests at all; the celebrated monastery of St. Sabbas the Sanctified, for example, had over 150 monks before having a single priest, and St. Sabbas himself, a younger contemporary of St. Romanus, is called the “Sanctified” or “Consecrated” because, possessing the priestly rank, he was a notable *exception* among the ranks of monks and even abbots. (Like St. Romanus, he was about 50 when his bishop compelled him to receive ordination as the first priest in his community.) Some forty years later, St. Eugendus, even after becoming abbot, stubbornly resisted being raised to the priesthood: “Often he would tell me in confidence that it was much better for an abbot, because of the ambition of the young, to direct the brothers without being clothed in the priesthood, without being bound by this dignity which should not be sought by men vowed to renunciation and withdrawal. ‘Besides,’ he added, ‘we also know that many fathers, after having practiced to perfection the humility of their state, have been deeply and secretly filled with pride by the priestly ministry. . .’” (chs. 133, 134). St. Lupicinus never received the priesthood, even after the death of St. Romanus, when he was abbot over the brethren for some twenty years. It is more than likely, then, that St. Romanus, in full accord with Eastern tradition, was the first priest of the community and that before his ordination, the Liturgy would be served in the oratory (chapel) only on the fairly rare occasions when a parish priest would visit. St. Eugendus himself was the son of perhaps the nearest parish priest during the lifetime of St. Romanus at Iznore (ch. 120). (Priests in the world in the West at this time, it should be noted, could be married, while bishops were required, if married when elected, to cease living with their wives after ordination.)

“St. Romanus, then, clothed with the priesthood, returned to the monastery; but remembering his original profession, he attached so little importance, in his monastic humility, to the prestige of the clerical office that although at the time of the solemnities, the brothers would be able to require him properly to occupy a higher place than they for the sacrifice, on the other days, monk among monks, he would not allow appearing on his person any sign of the eminent dignity of the priesthood” (ch. 20). This passage also would seem to indicate that the Liturgy, in the tradition of the Eastern lavras, was not celebrated every day at Condadisco, but only (perhaps) on Sundays and feast days.



The church at Romainmôtier — St. Romanus' monastery

With the increase of the brethren, several new monasteries were founded, all jointly under the two brothers' direction. “The site of the community of Condadisco from this time on had difficulty in providing support, not only for the crowds who came there but even for the brothers. Hanging on hills or leaning against slopes, in the midst of rocky projections and humps, ruined by frequent coursings of water over a stony soil, agriculture is limited and difficult, as much by the scantiness of the fields as by the poorness of the harvests and the uncertain yield. If, in fact, the rigours of the winter not merely cover but rather bury the countryside under snows, in spring, on the other hand, and in summer and autumn, either the

soil, overheated by the reflection of the heat off the nearby cliffs, is on fire, or else the overwhelming rains carry off in torrents not only the land made ready for agriculture but often also the uncultivable and hard terrain itself, together with the grass, the trees and shrubs . . . Thus, in their desire to avoid this scourge to a certain extent, the most holy Fathers, in the neighbouring forests, which were not at all deprived of places with less slope and more fertile, cut down firs, uprooted stumps. . . and made fields, so that this land, suitable for agriculture, might lessen the poverty of the inhabitants of Condadisco. Each of the two monasteries was submitted to the authority of the two Abbas. However, Father Lupicinus lived more especially and more usually at Laucone — the name which this place bears — and at the death of blessed Romanus there were left not less than 150 brothers, whom he had formed following his own discipline” (chs. 22-24). This, the second monastery of the Jura, several miles west of Condadisco, where the same river Bienne emerges from a deep gorge into a fertile plain, is the present-day village of St.-Lupicin, where the relics of St. Lupicinus are still to be found. St. Gregory, in his *Life* of the two saints, mentions another monastery founded by the brothers “in the territory of Alamannia”; this is usually interpreted as the monastery of Romainmoutier (in Latin, *Romani monastertum*, ‘Romanus’ monastery”) in Switzerland some 45 miles northeast of the original monastery. In addition to these main monasteries, there were numerous cells and hermitages scattered throughout the mountains, making of the Jura a kind of ‘Thebaid of the Gauls’ (or a Mount Athos), even though the population of monks never reached Egyptian proportions, being numbered in hundreds rather than thousands.

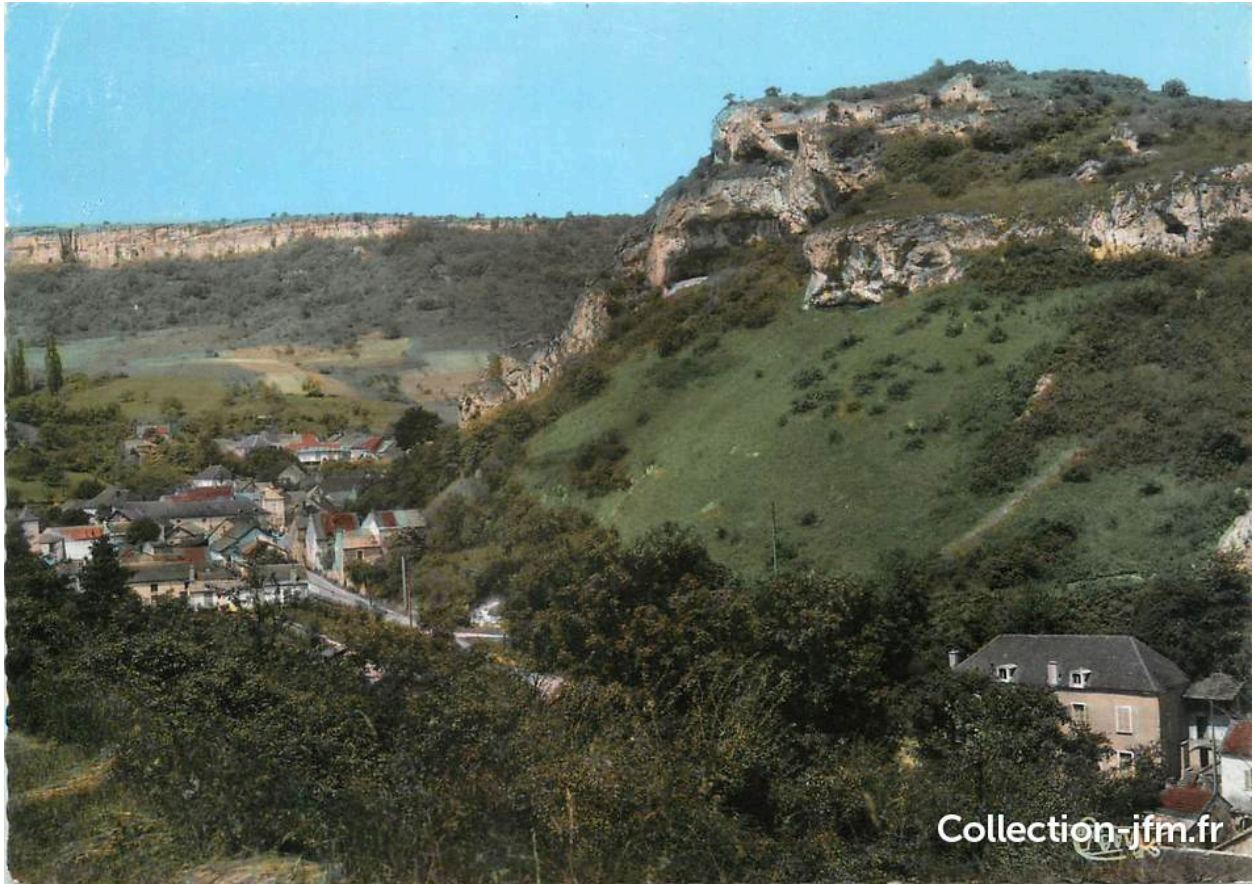
In the midst of all this fresh monastic activity, women too began to be attracted by the desert and by the example of the brother-saints; the first to come was the saints’ sister, Yole. As Sts. Anthony and Pachomius for their sisters (and later St. Caesarius of Arles for his sister Caesaria), so now the monastic founders of the Jura had to establish a monastic community for their sister and the women who followed her into the wilderness. “Not far from there, on a high cliff, dominated by a natural rock and bounded by a stone arch which concealed vast caverns within, the saints, according to tradition, established — being guided in their choice by parental affection — a Mother for a community of virgins, and assumed in this place the governance of 105 nuns. . . Here, the blessed Fathers constructed a basilica, which not only received the mortal remains of the virgins but also had the honour of containing the tomb of the hero of Christ, Romanus himself. So great was the strictness of the observances of this monastery that every virgin who entered there for renunciation was never again seen outside unless it is when she was carried to her tomb’ (chs. 25-26). This convent, known as “La Balme”, is not heard of later. Evidently, it disappeared amid the barbarian raids of the 5th and 6th centuries. It was perhaps the first western community for women in the “desert,” earlier convents having been established in or near cities. Later, a community of monks was

established nearby, and presently, the site (about three miles southwest of St.-Lupicin, also on the river Bienne) is near the town of St.-Romain-de-Roche, where the relics of St. Romanus are indeed still kept in the parish church. In later centuries, there was another community of nuns in the Jura, at Neuville-les-Dames, which was dependent on Condadisco; perhaps it was a successor to St. Yole's convent.

The rest of the Life of St. Romanus — the first of the three parts of the *Life of the Jura Fathers* — is devoted to the Saint's miracles, to the devil's attacks against the brethren, and to the weaknesses and murmuring of some of the brethren, once they came to accept the marvellous monasteries of the Jura as part of the church "establishment" and therefore something to be taken for granted. All of this is described in terms very familiar to readers of the Lives of the Eastern Fathers. St. Gregory of Tours relates some of it in his life of the brothers, although it is evident, because of many differences, that he did not have this life as his chief source, if he knew it at all.



The gorge of the river Bienne.



The cliffs of St. Yole's convent — showing the later monastery.



Salins — the salt-producing town of the Jura where the monks often travelled.



The town of Saint-Lupicin — site of the monastery of Laucone.



Chapelle Saint Romain-de-Roche, where the remains of St. Romanus are housed.



In one passage of the *Life of the Jura Fathers*, when one of the elder monks is described as complaining to St. Romanus that he is admitting too many aspirants into the community and not making a careful selection of them, the author takes the opportunity, in giving St. Romanus' reply, of describing something of the monastic spirit which St. Romanus imparted to the brethren, and also something of the monastic trials the brothers underwent. St. Romanus replies to the elder: 'Tell me, O you who desire for us so small a community: are you capable, among all the brothers whom you see about you in our community, of making the sorting and the division to form the two groups of which you speak, as if, in examining one after the other, you could separate perfectly, before their death, the tested saints from the careless ones?.... Have you not seen here in our community some monks devote themselves with fervor to a rule of life which, later on, after a slow decline from lukewarmness to lukewarmness, they trampled underfoot? How many times, also, brothers have left the community under the blow of a contrary impulse! And among these latter, how many times have we seen one or the other abandon the world again and return to us, once, twice, three times, and despite that, finding his courage again, persevere unto the palm of victory in the profession which he had abandoned so long before! Some, also, without incurring reproach,

return, not to their vices, but to their land of origin and observe there our rule with such love and zeal that, being raised to the priesthood by the love and the election of the faithful, they direct with great dignity monasteries and churches of Christ. . . And did you not see, quite recently, in our own monastery what happened to Maxeniius? After having imposed on himself an asceticism and privations unheard of in Gaul, with continual vigils after having shown untiring diligence in reading — persuaded by the vice of pride, he became the prey of the most impure of the demons, and his folly and rage surpassed by far that of those he had only lately taken care of, when he had been mighty in the fruit of his merits: bound with straps and ropes by those whom he had long before healed by the virtue of the Lord, he was finally delivered from the deadly spirit by anointment with holy oil. Therefore, acknowledge that it is the same pride, inspired by the devil, that secretly instigates you, and that your case is not very different from that of Maxentius”” (chs. 29, 32-34).

The *Life of the Jura Fathers* — like St. Gregory’s *Life* — shows the two brothers as different but complementary in their virtues: ‘The two Fathers surpassed each other in complementary qualities which are indispensable in the art of directing and governing. For if the blessed Romanus was very merciful towards all, with perfect calmness, his brother was more severe, both in correcting and directing others and, first of all, towards himself. Romanus, when all hope of pardon had been lost, would spontaneously make use of indulgence toward the guilty ones, while the other, fearing lest small sins, repeated, should end in great ones, gave reproaches with great vehemence. Romanus would impose on the brothers no more privations than their own will would accept; while Lupicinus, offering his own example to all, permitted none to avoid what the help of God made possible” (ch. 17). The austerities of St. Lupicinus are described in rather greater detail (chs. 63-67) than in St. Gregory’s life.

Toward the end of his life, St. Romanus made the longest journey recorded in his *Life* — a pilgrimage to the site of the martyrdom of St. Maurice and the Theban Legion in the third century. “In the ardour of his faith, he decided to go to Agaunum to the basilica of the saints —I should rather say, to the camp of the martyrs —according to the testimony furnished by the account of their passion” (ch. 44). The first account of the martyrdom of these saints is that of St. Eucherius of Lyons, which St. Romanus had apparently read. On this journey, near Geneva, the incident with the lepers mentioned by St. Gregory occurred. The organization of an actual monastery at Agaunum (as distinct from the cells of individual monks around the basilica, such as existed at the time of St. Romanus) dates from the early years of the 6th century, when the *Jaws perennis* (continual chanting of the psalms) was introduced there from

Constantinople; the monastery of Condadisco at that time sent 100 monks to form one of the nine choirs that alternated in the psalm-singing.

The death of St. Romanus occurred in the convent which he had established, where he had gone to bid farewell to his sister (ch. 60); this was about in the year 460. St. Gregory, in his *Life of the brothers*, does not mention the convent, perhaps because it no longer existed in his day. Still, he does mention the burial of St. Romanus outside the monastery, where women would have access to his relics.

Among the brothers who were being trained in monasticism by the two saints, there reigned above all an absolute oneness of soul based on self-sacrifice—a concept which is at the heart of Orthodox monasticism, whether of East or West. ‘According to the custom of apostolic times, absolutely no one would say, ‘This is mine.’ The difference between one person and another resided solely in the possession of his name and not in consideration of his fortune or nobility. Content with their destitution, they practiced oneness of soul (*unanimitas*) in love and faith with such fervour that if a brother, having received an order to do some task, should go out in cold weather or if he should have just returned all soaked by winter rain, everyone would eagerly abandon his most comfortable and driest garment or would take off his footwear the sooner to warm and comfort the body of his brother, rather than to think of himself’ (chs. 112-113).

St. Lupicinus governed the monasteries some twenty years after the death of St. Romanus, and he finally reposed in extreme old age, practicing the severest austerities to the end (refusing in the last moments of his final illness the consolation of a little honey with water). He was buried in the monastery of Laucone, where, in 1689, a part of his relics were uncovered, perhaps with his original tombstone, and they remain to this day in the parish church of St.-Lupicin.

St. Gregory does not treat the third of the great Jura Fathers, St. Eugendus. Still, he should be mentioned here for his historical importance in the development of monasticism in the West. His father, a parish priest, offered him to the monastery during St. Romanus's lifetime and, as has been said, remained there without leaving it until his death at the age of over sixty, in about 513.

In the monastery, “he acquired a solid knowledge of Latin works and Greek eloquence” (ch. 126). If St. Eugendus actually knew the Greek language, it would be a rare thing for late 5th-century Gaul. However, in any case, it is clear that the tie with the Greek East was still very strong in the Jura monasteries at this time, even if the Eastern Fathers were more

probably read in Latin translations. We know that the daily reading in the refectory at Condadisco (a custom introduced by St. Eugendus, “following the ancient Fathers” and in particular St. Basil (ch. 169); in the time of Sts. Romanus and Lupicinus, the traditional silence of the Egyptian monasteries was maintained) included “the institutions promulgated of old by the holy and eminent Basil, bishop of the capital of Cappadocia, or those of the holy Fathers of Lerins, or those of Saint Pachomius the ancient abba of the Syrians, or those which most recently the venerable Cassian has formulated” (ch. 174). If St. Romanus had begun his monastic life with only two books, it is clear that his successors had a well-equipped Patristic library!

In his asceticism St. Eugendus kept up the strict standard of his predecessors; his vigils were remarkable, and he ate but once a day, “sometimes at noon, with all the community, when he was tired, and sometimes in the evening, with the monks who took a second meal” (ch. 131). He had only one garment, which he would wear until it was worn out (ch. 127), and his footwear was “solid and rustic, in the fashion of the ancient Fathers. His legs were bound with leggings, and his feet in bands. But for the office of Matins and that of Lauds, he never had around his naked feet, even in the most severe frosts or when there was much snow, anything but wooden overshoes in the Gallic manner. It was with this footwear also that, very often, in the morning hours, he would walk far in the snow in order to go to the cemetery of the brethren and pray there” (ch. 129) like Sts. Romanus and Lupicinus, he was a miracle worker, and his fame was widespread so that for centuries, the town that sprang up around Condadisco bore his name (Saint-Oyend in French). There were so many pilgrims that they “seemed almost to exceed in number the multitude of monks” (ch. 147).

St. Eugendus directed the monks with the utmost prudence and wisdom: “He took all care to assign to each monk the functions or tasks for which he found him more particularly endowed by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Thus, a peaceable and gentle brother would be given a service and a post where the heat of an agitated companion would not alter the advantages of his gentleness and patience. Did he find others, on the contrary, marked by the blemish of pride or vanity? He would not permit them to live apart out of fear that, puffed up by an injurious feeling of their personal superiority, they might fall lower into more serious faults, no longer even realizing their sins and vices, in spite of repeated public reprimands. In the meantime, did he learn that certain brothers, suffering the condition of human weakness, were the prey of the biting of a devouring sadness? He would come unexpectedly, deliberately show such supernatural pleasantness and joy, warm the heart of the unfortunate ones with words so holy and sweet that the latter, purified of the most harmful venom of sadness, would find themselves healed of their bitter pessimism as by the anointment of a healing oil. But the

monks whose conduct was too free, those who were light-minded, always found in the Abba more of roughness and severity' (chs. 149-150).

One event during St. Eugendus' governance of the monasteries marked a whole change of epoch in Western monasticism. Occurring about the year 500, it is a kind of watershed between the less organized, semi-hermitic, lavra-type monasticism of the 4th and 5th centuries, which was very dependent upon the personal qualities of the great monastic founders (St. Martin, St. Honoratus, Sts. Romanus and Lupicinus), and the more strictly coenobitic monasticism of the 6th and later centuries. This event was the total destruction by fire of the monastery at Condat. "As it was built of wood, and not only was composed of a block of cells bound together one to the other by their frame, but had also been doubled by a well-arranged second story, it was so suddenly reduced to ashes that the next morning, not only did nothing remain of the buildings, but the fire itself was already almost entirely extinguished" (ch. 162). There were so many monks then in the monastery that, even apart from the fire, the Eastern lavra ideal of monks in separate cells had become impractical; the cells, rather than being a certain distance apart (a stone's throw, in the later description of the skete ideal by the Russian St. Nilus of Sora) were actually joined to each other. Therefore, when rebuilding the monastery, St. Eugendus introduced a strict coenobitic rule in the spirit of St. Pachomius rather than in that of most of the other monastic Fathers of the East. "Refusing to follow the example of the oriental archimandrites on this point, he did a more useful thing by subjecting all the monks to the common life. After the small individual cells were destroyed, he decided that all should take their repose with him in a single shelter: those whom a common refectory had already united for a common meal, he wished to unite also in a common dormitory, only the beds being separate. In this place, there was, as in the oratory, an oil lamp which gave its light the whole night long' (ch. 170).

One cannot but regret the disappearance of the West's early monastic "informality"; however, the coenobitic Rule's dominance was unavoidable. With his 80 monks, St. Martin could live in the isolation of Marmoutier like the "oriental archimandrites" with the brethren in their lavras; perhaps even a few hundred brothers could live like that in the remote Jura Mountains. But when there came to be multitudes of monastic aspirants (perhaps as many as a thousand), a strict regulation of them was obviously required. This need had been felt also in the East, as may be seen in the coenobitic establishments of Sts. Pachomius in Egypt, and Theodosius in Palestine, with thousands of monks, but the lavra or skete ideal remained alive in the East. It was never simply replaced by the coenobitic ideal.

In the West, the 6th century is the century of the great writers of monastic coenobitic Rules (St. Caesarius of Arles, St. Benedict of Nursia, St. Columbanus of Luxeuil and Bobbio, the

Irish monk who settled in Gaul and then Italy). Condadisco also had its own Rule, suited to “the climate of the country and the necessities of labour” as well as to “Gallic infirmity” (ch. 174); unfortunately, this Rule has not come down to us. Thanks to such Rules, a particular way of monastic life could spread farther and have more lasting influence than could the example of a single monastic founder. This is particularly noticeable in the spread of the Rule of St. Columbanus in the 7th century, especially in Gaul, and even more noticeable in the spread of the Benedictine Rule throughout the West in the 7th and later centuries. By Carolingian times (9th and 10th centuries), the Rule of St. Benedict was supreme even in individualistic Gaul. Thus, monasticism survived and was in relatively good order, but the young monastic movement's freshness and “non-establishment” character were largely lost. With monasticism such a small and fragile phenomenon in the Orthodox world today, it is no wonder we are drawn more to its early “unorganized” phase in the West rather than the later “organized” phase. Sixth-century Gaul, with few exceptions, still retained the early, individualistic character of monasticism; this is really the only kind to be seen in the *Life of the Fathers*, which, apart from bishop-ascetics, deals mostly with hermits and desert-dwellers, whether in the wilderness or in cities.

In the 6th and later centuries, other monastic communities were still established in the Jura by monks from Condadisco; at such sites as Grandvaux and the Lac de Bonlieu, there are still ruins of these monasteries. The village of Saint-Hymetiere, near the town of Antre, may still be seen as one of the oldest surviving churches of the Jura region; built in the 7th or 8th century, it houses the relics of St. Hymetiere, a 6th-century monk of Condadisco who founded a hermitage there.



The church of Saint-Hymetière, where relics of the 6th-century saint are kept.

The author of the *Life of the Jura Fathers* was a disciple and intimate of St. Eugendus; thus, he can relate about something of his hidden spiritual life. In particular, he talks about St. Eugendus's five visions and describes them to him in detail. These are a childhood vision of Sts. Romanus and Lupicinus showing him his spiritual posterity (chs. 121-124); his installation as abbot by the two saints, which occurred just before he was in fact made abbot (chs. 135-136); the visit of the Apostles Peter, Andrew and Paul, who announced the arrival of pieces of their relics from Rome (chs. 153-154); the vision of St. Martin of Tours (who was held in the highest veneration in the Jura monasteries), who informed St. Eugendus that he was watching over two travelling monks of the monastery (ch. 160); and the final appearance of Sts. Romanus and Lupicinus, five days before his death, carried him to the oratory for his funeral while his own monks protested (chs. 176-177).

The longest and most detailed of these visions is well worthy of comparison with similar visions in Eastern hagiographical literature (for example, the vision of the birds, signifying his spiritual posterity, in the *Life of St. Sergius of Radonezh*): “The holy child, in a vision, was carried by two monks and placed before the entrance of his father’s house, in such a way that he could behold with an attentive gaze the eastern region of the sky and its stars, as before the

Patriarch Abraham beheld his numerous posterity. And already he was also told, in a sort of figurative language: ‘Such will be your seed’ (Gen. 15:5). A little after this, one person appeared here, a second there, another in a different place, until the growing crowd of them became numberless; they surrounded the blessed child and the holy Fathers — without any doubt, Romanus and Lupicinus — who had spiritually raised him up.... It was as if an enormous swarm of bees, resembling a honey-flowing cluster, came together around them and enclosed them. And suddenly, from the side towards which his gaze was directed, Eugendus saw as it were a vast door open in the heights of heaven and a path of gentle slope descend from the summit of heaven to him, surrounded by light and resembling a slightly-inclined staircase with steps of crystal, and choirs of angels clothed in white and brightly shining, coming towards him and his companions: they joyfully exulted in the praise of Christ, and yet, despite the ever-increasing number of persons, the sacred fear of the Divinity, which struck them with amazement, did not allow any of them to move his lips to speak or his head to make a sign. Little by little, with care, the angelic multitude mixed with the mortals; the angels gathered these earthly beings, joined them to themselves, and, singing all the same song, mounted again towards the sacred abodes of heaven as they had come.

“Among the modulations of this hymn, the holy child understood only one phrase, a phrase of the Gospel, as he learned about a year later when he entered the monastery. Here is what the alternate choir of the angelic multitude said, in an antiphonal manner (I remember it very well because Eugendus himself had the kindness to relate it to me): ‘I am the Way and the Life and the Truth’ (John 14:6). Then the immense crowd retired; having been long beheld, the region of the heavens filled with stars also closed; the child, seeing himself alone in this place, awoke with a start and, struck with terror by this vision, immediately related the event to his father. And the holy priest recognized at once to whom supremely such a holy son should be consecrated. Without delay, he taught him the rudiments of knowledge, and at the end of the same year, Eugendus was offered to St. Romanus . . . In him, truly, converged the double profusion of graces accorded to the blessed Abbas who had spiritually transported him outside his earthly dwelling, so that the generation which immediately followed that of these Abbas already hesitated, asking whether in Eugendus it beheld the image of Lupicinus or that of Romanus” (chs, 121-125).

In this striking description of Jacob’s Ladder (Gen. 28:12) — the same image which St. Eucherius had used in his *Praise of the Desert* to describe the “unseen visitation” of “rejoicing angels making a watchful call upon the desert expanse” (ch. 38) — the author of the *Life of the Jura Fathers* well indicates the spiritual offspring of Condadisco and monastic Gaul in general. St Gregory’s *Life of the Fathers* will give us some details about the quality of

this monastic movement, which was still so powerful in his own day, a century after this vision.

Source: *Vita Patrum: The Life of the Fathers by St. Gregory of Tours* (tr. Fr. Seraphim Rose and Paul Bartlett), Saint Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, Platina, CA, 1988, pp. 94-140.